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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001117

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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD SITUATION REPORT: APRIL 9, 2200 LOCAL

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) PRTs and ePRTs report that most neighborhoods in Baghdad have been relatively quiet today, with fewer JAM members in evidence than before and greater IP presence. Sporadic violence continued between Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) elements and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and mortar rounds reportedly caused civilian casualties in Sadr City. With a strict curfew in effect, the roads were free of traffic, and few people ventured outdoors.

12. (C) Baghdad PRT relates that locals in Sadr City remain anxious. In a typical remark, one resident described the day's quiet as the "calm before the storm." A few residents reported added numbers of Iraqi Police (IP) patrolling their neighborhoods, which they viewed positively. Ali Lafta, a Director General (DG) in the Ministry of Displacement and Migration and a Sadr City resident, claimed there were JAM snipers and other armed elements posted throughout Sadr City, projecting control over "their turf."

13. (C) DG Ali Lafta described to PRTOff the siege-like conditions in his neighborhood, Mahalla 526 in Sadr City. Prices of commodities have shot through the roof; a package of tomatoes normally priced at 500ID is going for 2500ID (roughly \$3 USD). He said that a number of Sadr City families have picked up and moved temporarily to the homes of relatives in other, safer, sections of the city until tensions subside.

14. (C) Mohammed al-Maliki, one of two qa'im makams (local mayors) in Sadr City, told PRTOff that the military pressure placed on JAM by the GOI and Coalition has weakened JAM's status and popularity in Baghdad. While supportive of Coalition actions against JAM, he said that "excessive force" is too often used by Coalition forces in Sadr City, alienating many citizens from the Coalition and making them more likely to embrace JAM.

15. (C) EPRT 6 Team Leader reported that conditions were calm and streets clear while traveling this afternoon to Karkh and through Mansour, two largely mixed (Sunni and Shia) districts in western Baghdad, including a visit to the northern Ghazaliya-Shu'la border area where many clashes took place ten days ago. (Note. The Ghazaliya-Shu'la border is a Sunni/Shia fault line in western Baghdad dividing a mainly Sunni enclave in northern Mansour from Shia Kadhimiya. End Note.) He said numerous Iraqi Army (IA) and IP units were seen manning checkpoints and performing security duties. No shops were open other than a few tiny convenience stores selling vegetables. Some fresh anti-Maliki and anti-Hakim/Badr graffiti was visible on walls in Sadrism areas.

16. (C) EPRT 6 also observed one small organized march in the vicinity of Kadhimiya Shrine around 2:00pm that lasted about an hour. A total of roughly 100 marchers - including about 20 wearing turbans thought to be clerics or religious

students - were led by one individual holding up a large photograph, likely that of Sadrism martyr Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr al-Sadr. Other marchers followed, pushing a mock casket down the street. Some marchers held up large banners and could be seen shouting and pumping their fists as they marched. Some IA and IP watched but did not interfere and may have been providing security for the march. There were few spectators because of the curfew.

¶7. (C) Provincial government official Kadhim al-Shimari reported that the Karada peninsula, generally one of the safer districts in Baghdad, remains calm but tense and without a large number of security forces or militia elements present. Al-Shimari told PRTOff that many Karada residents are nervous that violence could erupt in Sadr City and spill over into their district.

¶8. (C) Referring to the postponed Sadrism demonstration, several contacts told Baghdad PRT that Muqtada al-Sadr (MAS) clearly knew that he would be unable to muster the "millions" he needed, given the GOI's effective blocking off of Baghdad to youth attempting to travel to Sadr City from the southern provinces. The last-minute change of heart can be seen as evidence that the GOI pressure on JAM is indeed weakening the Sadrists, according to Sadr City qa'im makam Al-Maliki.

¶9. (C) A prominent Sadrism within Baghdad's provincial government, Deputy Governor Qassim Al-Durraji, said that the GOI has actually missed the perfect opportunity to build political unity in Iraq by preventing the demonstration. The GOI and Coalition should have "embraced" the idea of a peaceful march and supported the "expression of democracy" in the streets of Sadr City. Deputy Governor Al-Durraji told PRTOff that many Sadrists desire a more open dialogue with

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Americans and a more frank discussion on the common goals that Sadrists feel they share with the U.S.

¶10. (SBU) Hours after MAS postponed the march on April 8, prominent Sunni cleric and opposition figure Harith Al-Dhari, who resides in Jordan, called for widespread demonstrations across the country to protest the U.S. presence in Iraq. Speaking on Al-Jazeera TV, Al-Dhari exhorted Iraqis to "demonstrate in all cities and village to protest the Occupation and the current rule" in Iraq. (Note: So far there are preliminary news reports of a small (50 person) demonstration in Fallujah, organized by the Iraqi Islamic Party. End Note.)  
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